

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

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## U.S. Urges Investigation of Alleged Syrian Chemical Attack

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 21 August 2013

Washington — The Obama administration expressed deep concern over reports that hundreds of Syrian civilians were killed near Damascus in an attack that included the use of chemical weapons and requested that a United Nations team in Syria be allowed immediate and unfettered access to investigate the reports.

In an August 21 statement, White House principal deputy press secretary Josh Earnest said the United States strongly condemns “any and all use” of chemical weapons, and that those responsible for their use must be held accountable.

“If the Syrian government has nothing to hide and is truly committed to an impartial and credible investigation of chemical weapons use in Syria, it will facilitate the U.N. team’s immediate and unfettered access to this site,” Earnest said.

For the U.N. team’s efforts to have credibility, the team “must have immediate access to witnesses and affected individuals, and have the ability to examine and collect physical evidence without any interference or manipulation from the Syrian government,” he said.

The Obama administration has also called for urgent consultations in the U.N. Security Council to discuss allegations of the attack and to call for Bashar al-Assad’s regime to provide the U.N. investigative team with immediate access. Earnest added that all Syrian parties need to provide the team with access to any site of importance to its investigation and to ensure team members security.

In remarks to reporters August 21, Earnest said there is a broad international view that the use of chemical weapons is “completely unacceptable” and the situation “is and should be a top priority of the United Nations.”

The Assad regime has previously claimed it is interested in “a credible investigation that gets to the bottom of reports that chemical weapons have been used” in Syria, he said. “It’s time for the Assad regime to live up to their rhetoric in this regard,” he added.

Earnest said those responsible for any use of chemical weapons would be held accountable, and those responsible for safeguarding chemical weapons would be held accountable for the way in which those weapons are handled.

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said August 21

that after months of working to get the U.N. investigative team into Syria, its presence in the country offers of opportunity to immediately investigate the allegations of chemical weapons use.

If Syrian officials “have nothing to hide, they should be providing the team with unfettered access,” she said and urged international support for the U.N. team.

“There should be no country that stands by or accepts the credible use or the potential credible use of chemical weapons, and every country should be supporting the effort by the U.N. investigative team to go in and look at as many cases as they can possibly look at. And we believe there’s a moral imperative to allow that to happen,” Psaki said.

## Cooperation on Water Use Is Essential, Conferees Agree

22 August 2013

Washington — International and regional cooperation on the use of water resources is essential for every human activity, delegates to an August 20–21 conference in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, said.

The Central Asian city hosted a U.N. conference in conjunction with the International Year of Water Cooperation. A U.N. General Assembly resolution in 2010 designated 2013 as the year.

“There is no alternative to cooperation on water,” said the U.S. representative at the meeting, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Reifsnyder of the department’s Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs.

Increasing demands from growing populations and economic activities will place ever greater demands on finite resources, Reifsnyder said, making cooperative water management imperative.

The United States has “a range of institutional arrangements that support joint research, data sharing and cooperative decisionmaking,” Reifsnyder said. “We are working with Canada, jointly managing our shared river systems to optimize power production, protect the environment and minimize the risks from floods.”

The United States also has resource-sharing agreements with Mexico on its southern border, Reifsnyder said.

About 770 million people worldwide lack access to an improved water source and 2.5 billion lack access to basic sanitation, according to estimates made by the U.N. Development Programme.

At the same time, UNDP Associate Administrator Rebeca Grynspan said, limited resources are subject to greater stresses.

“Water waste and water pollution increasingly threaten the integrity of aquatic and agro ecosystems vital for life and food security,” Grynspan said at the multilateral meeting hosted by the Tajik government.

Reifsnyder said discussions at the Dushanbe meeting reflected a broadly shared understanding of the problems surrounding water resources. He cited a mutual willingness among participants to share resource data and work toward joint solutions in the allocation of resources.

According to UNDP, more than 260 watersheds cross political boundaries of two or more countries, representing about half of the Earth’s land surface and serving 40 percent of the global population. Through the Shared Water Partnership, UNDP has helped more than 100 countries prepare cooperative management plans in these shared water systems.

The United States provides funding for the partnership, Reifsnyder said, to foster political cooperation on shared waters which, in time, will support other development assistance efforts.

This high-level meeting is held as the international community recognizes the U.N International Decade for Action “Water for Life, 2005–2015.”

Between 1990 and 2010, more than 2 billion people gained access to clean drinking water, according to a 2012 U.N. announcement, cutting in half the proportion of people without safe drinking water.

### **Report: Global Partnership Needed to Reach Outer Space**

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 21 August 2013

Washington — NASA and 13 like-minded space agencies from around the world released a global plan for space exploration August 20, asking some of the biggest questions humanity has ever pondered: Why should earthlings go to space? What should be accomplished there? How do we make the way?

They first answered some of those questions with a report in 2007. Now the member agencies of the International Space Exploration Coordination Group have updated that plan in The Global Exploration Roadmap, based on mutual agreement that the endeavor is so huge, nations must combine their efforts to fulfill the vision.

Robotic and human exploration of Mars is the first near-term target in the plan, with development of a step-by-

step strategy that begins with the International Space Station in its low Earth orbit, where these global partners already have gained fundamental knowledge for travelling to farther regions of space.

The station “is the foundation of exploration, advancing critical capabilities to take humans further into space and reducing the cost of human space flight,” according to the report, issued by the coordination group August 20.

As the rovers Opportunity, Spirit and Curiosity have demonstrated on Mars, robots are the groundbreakers for human exploration. Further robotic missions to the moon and asteroids can help expand knowledge and capability in roaming the planets, the report reasons, so that human missions will be safer and more productive.

The next step outlined in the road map is to undertake more human missions in near space to develop crew and engineering skills that will form the basis for trips to Mars or other space destinations in the future.

By 2020, these collaborative efforts should produce commercial and/or government platforms for missions in low Earth orbit, according to the goals identified in the report. By 2030, the collaborating space agencies aspire to undertake missions to Mars and beyond. At an unspecified date beyond that point, the 14 space agencies envision a human colony on the lunar surface.

The plan identifies a package of shared goals that the space agencies hope to fulfill as they make their way to outer space, including public engagement in the endeavor, enhancing the safety of the planet from space debris, extending human presence beyond the realm of Earth and performing science.

“Stimulating economic expansion” is cited as another mutual goal because, the strategy specifies, “agency leaders should maintain a focus on delivering value to the public.”

Nor does the report overlook the question that has inspired generations of dreamers, writers and video-game designers: the search for life.

“Pursuing this goal continues the cultural quest of humankind to determine whether we are alone in the universe, and answers deeply rooted questions about our origin and evolution,” the report says. “The question of whether life exists beyond Earth has great philosophical and scientific significance.”

Taken together, the goals and near-term objectives form what the report describes as “a mission scenario.” It is built on a foundation that also takes account of affordability and public support. International

partnership is another key pillar supporting the scenario, devoted to building greater competence in each space agency while “allowing each to sustain and grow its aspirations for space exploration.”

Longevity and resiliency of sustained space exploration depend on these partnerships, the strategy says, protecting the program “against failures, delays or programmatic issues.”

In a public appearance August 20, NASA Administrator Charles Bolden said of the strategy, “Together with space agencies from around the world, we are expanding our reach into the solar system as well as our human and technical capabilities.”

Bolden’s comments came as he introduced the newest members of NASA’s astronaut corps, eight men and women selected from 6,000 applicants to advance the nation’s space activities. “They will be among those to plan and perhaps carry out the first-ever human missions to an asteroid and to Mars,” Bolden said at NASA’s Johnson Space Center in Houston.

The International Space Exploration Coordination Group is a voluntary international collaboration allowing participating agencies to exchange information about their interests, objectives and plans in space exploration. The partnership is devoted to strengthening both individual exploration programs and the collective effort.

Space agencies from Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Russia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States are involved along with the multilateral membership of the European Space Agency.

### **Bangladesh, U.S. Prepare for Next Earthquake**

20 August 2013

*This article was originally published on the U.S. Pacific Command website on August 19.*

Dhaka, Bangladesh — Historical patterns in the Bangladesh region reflect that the heavily populated country, which sits on three crossing fault lines, is three decades overdue for a major earthquake.

In an effort to prepare for the massive impact that such an unpredictable disaster would have on the country, members of the U.S. Army partnered with the Bangladesh Armed Forces Division in developing a realistic exercise that brings together civil and military experts to build a framework of regional collaboration, readiness and response.

Government and civil organizations and international

observers kicked off the 2013 Pacific Resilience Disaster Response Exercise & Exchange, known as a DREE, with an opening ceremony August 18 in Dhaka.

The four-day DREE is the fourth annual humanitarian assistance/disaster relief engagement between the U.S. Army and the Bangladeshi military, and its goal is to prepare a Multi-National Coordination Centre plan that integrates response across civil and military institutions.

“It is not a question of whether,” explained U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh Dan Mozena. “It is not a question of if. It is only a question of when. When will Dhaka be hit by a large-magnitude earthquake? If Dhaka were hit by a 7.0 magnitude earthquake, then about 20 percent of the 350,000 buildings in this great megacity would collapse.”

While Bangladesh is accustomed to thinking about the unthinkable and is often considered a global model of preparedness for various types of natural disasters, earthquake response is an area that the country has little experience with. Through exercises such as the DREE, America continues to assist Bangladesh in preparing for such a disaster.

“Events like the DREE contribute to our common goal of humanity,” said Lieutenant General Abu Belal Mohammad Shafiul Haque, the Bangladesh Armed Forces Division’s principal staff officer. “Let us all work together and combine our efforts, and mitigate the impact of natural disasters.”

The 2013 DREE opened with expert presentations on earthquake vulnerability in Bangladesh, U.S. disaster management response, the Standing Order on Disasters and the National Disaster Management Act, the Dhaka City earthquake contingency response plan, and international disaster response.

A tabletop exercise provides a forum for 128 participants to brainstorm and engage in discussions related to a major earthquake scenario. A field training exercise allows 450 participants to apply those discussions in a practical setting at the Fire Service & Civil Defense Training Academy in Mirpur.

The field training exercise hinges on four major areas: command and control, search and rescue, engineering, and debris management. It features a rubble pile simulating a collapsed building, providing realistic search and rescue training opportunities for civil organizations and rescue volunteers.

The DREE will conclude with a full day dedicated to an after-action review, where participants can share what they think went well and what can be improved in future

exchanges.

## U.S. Deplores Ongoing Violence in Egypt

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 19 August 2013

Washington — The Obama administration has condemned the continuing violence in Egypt, including attacks on security forces in the Sinai peninsula and Christian institutions, and the deaths of Muslim Brotherhood prisoners held in detention.

Speaking to reporters August 19, State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said there have been many instances of violence stemming from the political conflict between Egypt's interim government and supporters of deposed President Mohamed Morsy. She urged all sides to refrain from further bloodshed.

"There is absolutely no place for such violence in Egypt. We call on all Egypt's leaders and the international community to condemn such attacks without equivocation," Psaki said.

Psaki condemned an attack earlier in the day on a convoy in the Sinai peninsula that reportedly killed 24 Egyptian policemen.

She also said the United States deplores "the reprehensible attacks against over 40 Coptic Christian churches and other Christian institutions, including schools, social service societies and businesses, by extremists bent on sowing interreligious strife when the vast majority of Egyptians reject such behavior."

Psaki said U.S. officials are also "deeply troubled by the suspicious deaths of Muslim Brotherhood prisoners and a purported prison escape attempt near Cairo."

She said U.S. assistance to the Egyptian government has been under review since Morsy's July 3 ouster by Egyptian security forces and subsequent attacks on his supporters, saying that "when hundreds of civilians are killed, it's not business as usual."

White House spokesman Josh Earnest told reporters August 19 that senior U.S. officials have remained in contact with Egypt's interim government and made it clear that they need to "follow through on their promise to transition back to a democratically elected civilian government in Egypt," as well as to respect basic human rights.

"That includes ... the right to peaceful protest, and it means the end of politically motivated detentions" and ending the recently imposed state of emergency, Earnest said.

He said the review of U.S. assistance is "ongoing."

"There certainly are consequences for the actions that are taken by the interim government," Earnest said, noting the recent cancellation of a U.S.-Egyptian military exercise and the delayed delivery of F-16 fighter jets to the country.

Earnest said U.S. officials are evaluating U.S. assistance based upon U.S. national security interests and U.S. legal obligations under the annual Foreign Operations Appropriations Act.

Along with military cooperation, ties between the United States and the Egyptian government include U.S. economic support, assistance through the International Monetary Fund and tourism, which plays a significant role in Egypt's economy.

"This is a multifaceted relationship that we have with Egypt; we certainly value that relationship. I think that it's fair to say that the Egyptian government does as well," Earnest said.

Spokeswoman Psaki said the Obama administration's review of assistance does not include Egyptian nongovernmental entities and programs designed to promote free and fair elections, health assistance, the environment, democracy, the rule of law and good governance.

## U.S. Wants to Conclude Trans-Pacific Talks

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer | 19 August 2013

Washington — The top U.S. trade negotiator said in Tokyo that the United States wants to conclude talks on the Trans-Pacific Partnership deal in 2013.

"TPP will reinforce the shared determination of Japan, the United States and other TPP countries to create a high-standard, comprehensive, job-supporting agreement that addresses 21st-century trade issues and introduces new disciplines into the global trading system," U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman said August 19 in a speech to Japan's National Press Club.

The agreement, Froman said, "will result in an open and transparent regional economic order that can serve as a road map for free, open and transparent markets across the Asia-Pacific."

The United States joined TPP negotiations in 2009. Japan, the world's third-largest economy, joined in 2013. Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam are the other nations working toward the agreement.



"Great nations accomplish more when they partner with each other," Froman said, adding that Japan has an important role to play in the negotiations "as a leader in the region and as a partner to the United States."

Froman said officials of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration have expressed their commitment to completing "a high-standard TPP that is good for Japan and good for the region" before the end of the year. He added that such an agreement would be one in which all goods are subject to negotiation.

Froman said Japan and the United States have an unprecedented opportunity to move beyond trade conflicts from the past toward greater cooperation.

He specifically urged Japan to reduce barriers to its automotive and insurance markets and nontariff measures in other sectors. He said U.S. negotiators were encouraged "when Abe said that he wants Japan to be 'open to the entire world.'"

He also said that the United States and Japan share interests in such trade areas as intellectual property rights, investment and the digital economy. The United States, he added, has pursued reforms by overhauling its financial regulatory system, restructuring its automotive sector and adopting comprehensive health-care reform.

The 19th round of TPP negotiations will be held in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, August 23-30.

### **U.S. Celebrates ASEAN's 46th Anniversary**

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer | 16 August 2013

Washington — The 46th anniversary of ASEAN — the Association of Southeast Asian Nations — was celebrated at a special event at the U.S. Department of State August 15.

Greeting guests from the diplomatic corps, Daniel Russel, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, said the United States is "deeply committed to supporting and partnering with ASEAN."

ASEAN was launched August 8, 1967, when the leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand crafted an agreement "to bind themselves together in friendship and cooperation and, through joint efforts and sacrifices, secure for their peoples and for posterity the blessings of peace, freedom and prosperity," according to the organization's website.

Today the membership is made up of 10 nations: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Burma, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. But in an effort to further integrate the region,

ASEAN has created various organizations within its framework that include, among others, the United States, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, India, Russia, Australia and New Zealand.

The United States began engagement with ASEAN as a dialogue partner in 1977 and has actively maintained cooperation with ASEAN ever since. Starting in the early 1990s, development cooperation has increased dramatically through the launch of economic programs focusing on trade and investment, technology transfer and education. The United States maintains a mission to ASEAN in Jakarta, Indonesia, currently led by Ambassador David Carden.

In his prepared remarks at the Washington celebration, Russel said U.S. engagement with ASEAN "extends to the highest levels of our government." President Obama, he noted, has attended the last three East Asia summits and in 2013 will hold his fifth consecutive summit with ASEAN leaders in Brunei.

The ASEAN-U.S. partnership, Russel said, "is grounded in cooperation across political, security and cultural spheres."

"Our engagement with ASEAN," Russel said, "has led to tangible results in such areas as maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Our work through the Lower Mekong Initiative has led to positive outcomes supporting the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015 and development in the Lower Mekong subregion."

According to Russel, people-to-people exchanges with a specific focus on ASEAN or a high concentration of ASEAN member nations play a growing role in the U.S.-ASEAN partnership.

"A \$25 million joint project funded by the government of Brunei in partnership with the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs aims to improve English-language skills in ASEAN," Russel said.

"A new U.S.-ASEAN Fulbright initiative for ASEAN Fulbright scholars," Russel said, "supports research on ASEAN-related topics in the United States and enables American Fulbright scholars to conduct research in ASEAN member countries. This initiative builds upon the more than 700 Fulbright scholarships awarded to U.S. or ASEAN member-country citizens each year for study, research or teaching."

U.S. Secretary of State Kerry attended his first ASEAN Regional Forum and U.S.-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in July 2013, and President Obama, along with other top U.S. officials, plans to attend the U.S.-ASEAN Summit and the

East Asia Summit in October 2013.

In his statement released August 8, Kerry said ASEAN, with its population of 600 million, plays a critical role in Asia through promoting regional integration and maintaining regional security and is “the keystone for Asia’s multilateral architecture.”

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